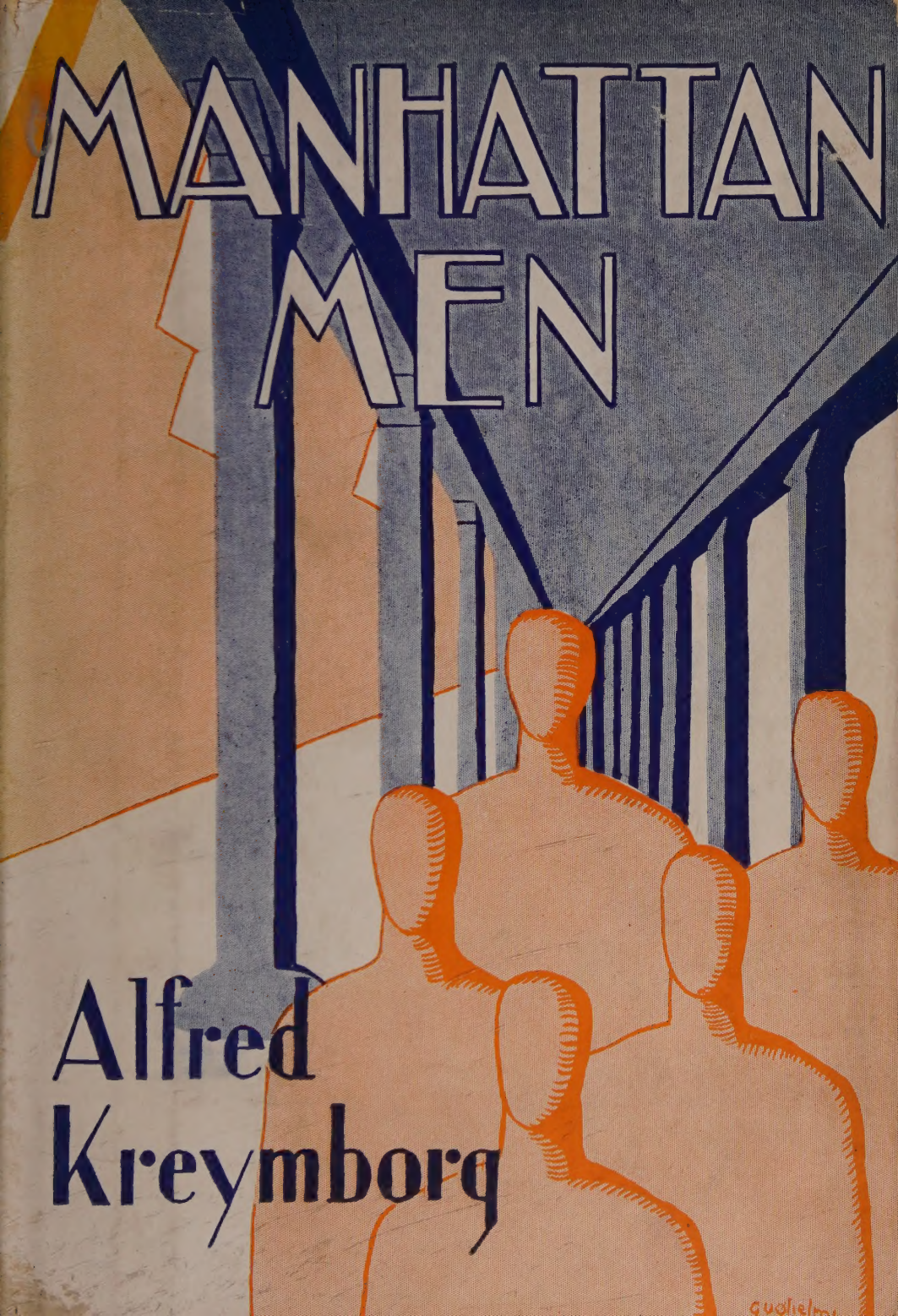
# MANHATTAN MEN



Alfred Kreymborg

$2.00

To the uniform collection of the poetry of Alfred Kreymborg being gathered by us, we now take pleasure in adding his latest volume, MANHATTAN MEN. This is Mr. Kreymborg's first book of poems on his native city, and it roams the whole gamut of the little island, from the Bowery to Harlem, Trinity spire to the latest skyscraper, old Fifth to modern Park Avenue, accompanied by a host of pen portraits of the everlasting poor and the tragic-comic rich. Comedy is the principal vein of the book—satire, irony, humor, and even nonsense—and among the hundred odd sharp etchings and songs, there is a group of 60 epitaphs on New Yorkers of all degrees. Even the author himself does not escape a witty burial. MANHATTEN MEN is certain to become the most widely enjoyed of Alfred Kreymborg's many books.

*Uniform with this edition*:

**The Lost Sail**
**Mushrooms**
**Blood of Things**
**Less Lonely**
$2.00 each

MANHATTAN MEN

BOOKS BY
THE SAME AUTHOR:

THE LOST SAIL
MUSHROOMS
BLOOD OF THINGS
LESS LONELY
SCARLET AND MELLOW
PUPPET PLAYS
PLAYS FOR MERRY ANDREWS
ROCKING CHAIRS
THERE'S A MOON TONIGHT
FUNNYBONE ALLEY
TROUBADOUR

ALFRED KREYMBORG

# MANHATTAN MEN

(*Poems and Epitaphs*)

PUBLISHED IN NEW YORK BY
COWARD·McCANN, INC.
IN THE YEAR 1929

COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY
ALFRED KREYMBORG
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

*Printed in the U. S. A.*

FOR THE EVER LIVING D.

*Most of these poems and notes were written at a time when April is winter at home and spring elsewhere.*

*For permission to reprint some of these numbers the author makes his grateful acknowledgments to the editors of American Poetry for 1927, Books, The Dial, Morrow's Almanac for 1929, The Nation, The New Masses, The New Republic, The New Yorker, Poetry, Transition.*

# *Contents*


| | *Page* |
|---|---|
| NEW YORK OLD AND NEW: | |
| MANHATTAN MEN | 1 |
| MUTED STRINGS: | |
| I. STREETS AND CARPETS | 2 |
| II. MY MOTHER'S LIFE | 3 |
| III. MY FATHER'S LIFE | 4 |
| IV. A SUNDAY IN CENTRAL PARK, 1900 | 5 |
| WHITE CRÊPE ON THE DOOR (OLD BOWERY BALLAD) | 7 |
| THE MORNING, NOON AND NIGHT OVERTURE (OLD BOWERY LOVE SONG) | 8 |
| TO THE TUNE OF A HURDY-GURDY (OLD BOWERY WALTZ) | 9 |
| A BARKER INCITES AN OLD MAN TO SPEND A CENT (OLD BOWERY MUSEUM) | 10 |
| MANHATTAN SONATA: | |
| I. THE TOWN THAT KNOWS IT ALL | 14 |
| II. COLD COQUETTE | 15 |
| III. FASCINATION | 16 |
| IV. NATURE CHANTS A SNATCH OR TWO | 17 |
| DEMOCRATIC DRAMATISTS | 18 |
| ADVICE TO AMBITIOUS AMERICANS | 19 |
| YOUNG HARLEM | 20 |
| MANHATTAN DE LA MANCHA | 21 |
| HARLEM STOOP | 22 |

| | Page |
|---|---|
| NEW YEAR'S EVE AND NEW YEAR'S DAY | 25 |
| STAR WAITRESS | 27 |
| THOSE EVERLASTING BLUES | 28 |
| OLD RALPH WALDO | 33 |
| THE LATEST HEADLINES | 34 |
| A DOG'S LIFE | 36 |
| EMPIRE | 37 |
| FACTORIES | 38 |
| DEMOCRACY | 39 |
| DONKEY | 41 |
| ONE-SIDED WEDDING | 42 |
| SNAILS | 43 |
| AMERICAN AEROPLANE | 44 |
| SEEING HER, SEEING ME | 45 |
| AN ANSWER TO THOMAS HARDY | 46 |
| TRINITY CHURCHYARD, 1929 | 47 |
| MANHATTAN EPITAPHS | |
| PRELUDE | 51 |
| AGES PAST | 52 |
| TOO COLD | 53 |
| LITTLE LIFE | 54 |
| COMMUNION | 54 |
| MOODS | 55 |
| KEEPING PACE | 55 |
| FAME | 56 |
| OBLIVION | 56 |

| | Page |
|---|---|
| DERBY AND CROWN | 57 |
| LOVE | 57 |
| FULFILLMENT | 58 |
| ESTRANGED | 58 |
| WIND AND WIND | 59 |
| THIS GRAVE | 59 |
| WHITE IN THE DARK | 60 |
| THIEVES | 60 |
| PANACEA | 61 |
| TRAVELLER | 61 |
| HARLEQUIN | 62 |
| RIPOSTE | 62 |
| BEARD | 63 |
| HOBO | 63 |
| BOURGEOIS | 64 |
| QUIET SOCIETY | 64 |
| WHORE | 65 |
| TRUE NEWS | 65 |
| GRANDMOTHER | 66 |
| SCHOOLMARM | 66 |
| OLD COUPLE | 67 |
| CONTEMPT OF COURT | 67 |
| TIME CLOCK | 68 |
| THE BOSS | 68 |
| TWO WEEKS | 69 |
| BROKER | 70 |

| | Page |
|---|---|
| LAWYER | 70 |
| NEW YORKER | 71 |
| BURGOMASTER | 71 |
| THEOLOGY | 72 |
| HUMANITY | 72 |
| SCULPTURE | 73 |
| TOO SENSITIVE | 73 |
| ACCEPTED | 74 |
| POPULARITY | 74 |
| CONTEMPORARY | 75 |
| GENIUS | 75 |
| POET | 75 |
| THREE ACT TRAGEDY | 76 |
| CONSCRIPTION | 77 |
| CAKE ON SUNDAY | 78 |
| NONCHALANCE | 78 |
| CLASSICS | 79 |
| MISANTHROPE | 79 |
| APRIL FIRST | 80 |
| COMMONPLACE | 80 |
| UNDERGROUND | 81 |
| PHILOSOPHERS | 81 |
| EPHEMERA | 82 |
| CHANGE | 82 |
| LAST OF ALL | 83 |
| LONELY TRUTH | 83 |

| | Page |
|---|---|
| PARK AVENUE LYRICS | |
| THIRD AVENUE LAUGHS AT FOURTH | 87 |
| PARK AVENUE FIDDLE | 88 |
| PARK AVENUE PORTRAITS | 89 |
| PARK AVENUE BUSTS | 90 |
| CHICKEN SALAD | 91 |
| FOREIGN FURNITURE | 92 |
| THE BULL'S EYE | 93 |
| GLOBE WERNICKE | 94 |
| ANOTHER WEDDING | 95 |
| ROYAL WEDDING | 96 |
| TRAVELLING MEN | 97 |
| CORPORATION COUNSELLOR | 98 |
| ONCE A MONTH | 99 |
| ONCE A YEAR | 100 |
| TIME CLOCK RHYME | 101 |
| INCH WORMS | 102 |
| DISTINCTION | 103 |
| EQUAL QUALITY | 104 |
| HELLO DARLING! | 105 |
| THE FAITHFUL DOLLAR | 106 |
| SONG WITHOUT WORDS | 107 |
| LIEBESTOD | 108 |
| CUPID'S CUPIDITY | 109 |
| NEAR RELATIVES | 110 |
| PARK AVENUE POET | 111 |

NEW YORK OLD AND NEW

## *Manhattan Men*

Manhattan men are made like me
  And I am made like them:
I love and hate and berate them and
  Then love them all again:

Since I dropped into a swinging crib
  Through my tall father's fire,
We've worn and torn our island down
  And raised it ten times higher:

Though it's not clear what we're building here,
  Nor what bold sky we're for,
We're doing it with high shoulders and
  We'll do it till we're no more.

## *I. Streets And Carpets*

December snow is here again
  And still my memory wears
White aprons my small mother wore
  Through my first twenty years.

December snow is swept away,
  Manhattan streets are clean,
And on a silent floor I see
  One carpet clear and green.

## *II. My Mother's Life*

When people jar and jangle again
  And true friends knife each other,
Blindness, pride, intolerance,
  Brother to bloody brother,

I dream of one round human who
  Loved every thing that moved
Because in her simplicity
  There were none she disapproved.

## *III. My Father's Life*

When Father let our store decline
  And turned to nocturnal chess
And I stood hating his cautious chums
  Who stole each small success

By starting timid French Defences
  Against his bold king pawn
And luring his impetuous hand
  To lose what he might have drawn,

Mother would call through the smoky gloom,
  *Komm, Herrmann, es ist spät,*
And he'd resign to her as well:
  *Jetzt geht, Herrschaften, geht.*

## *A Sunday In Central Park, 1900*

When Central Park begins to bloom
my father takes his cane
and walks about each flower bed
and talks aloud again.

And if he find some dark blue buds
have turned to pansies, then
he sinks upon a bench content
with these *Stiefmütterchen.*

But I who toss beside him there
would rather be with men
who feel a century unfold
and wait for me and them.

*Du Bengel du, nu sieh mal da*
*wie blau die bunten Blumen blühn.*
I hate to disappoint him
so I quickly answer, *Ja.*

*Hast du schon einiges gesehn*
*so hold und schön und rein?*
I mustn't disillusion him
and so I answer, *Nein.*

I only have to hearken to
the speeches meant for me:
my two small words suffice for him
so long as we agree.

## *White Crêpe On The Door*
### (*Old Bowery Ballad*)

My father was unfaithful
and my mother was untrue,
and if you spy this bit of crêpe
you'll see what I am too.

Between the life he led her
and the love that she led him,
there's nothing left of what I was
or what I might have been.

And yet my lot's a blessing—
the crêpe might have been black—
I died when I was six months old—
I'd never take them back.

Now, Stranger, when you're passing by
remember if you can:
a man should never marry woman,
woman marry man.

## *The Morning, Noon And Night Overture*
### (*Old Bowery Love Song*)

He said good morning to her,
  She said good morning too,
But when he tried to kiss her mouth
  She said good afternoon:

And when he said good evening
  The moon turned on the light
That must have foiled his game again—
  She up and said good night.

## *To The Tune Of A Hurdy-Gurdy*
### (*Old Bowery Waltz*)

It was easy to see that the woman was waiting for someone.
And not hard to tell that the first one to stop her would do.
And the one to do that was a drunkard, a blind, deaf and dumb one,
Who took off his hat to her, knelt to her, then kissed her shoe.

It was clear as the dawn when he came down the stair he was thinking.
Disillusioned and sad with the time that he'd had up above.
The bums who'd been with her before said, "You must have been drinking
The darkest old Bowery dregs to take that for your love."

The sun rose, the moon rose, the stars rose, a cloudless procession,
A golden, a copper, a silver afire, aflame.
And there where a shadow returns to the oldest profession,
It is easy to see that the first one will do just the same.

## *A Barker Incites An Old Man To Spend A Cent*
### (*Old Bowery Museum*)

If the girls you used to know
with their little hills of snow
never kept their golden eyes aglow
for you,

And the ones you wished to wed
married other men instead
and to each and every other bed
were true,

And if all the girls are gone
who have roamed the world alone
and the cold can only drive you home
again,

Come and step in off the street,
no, don't stop to wipe your feet,
lay your stick aside and take this seat
for men.

Here's a hula hula girl
who can shimmy like a pearl
whose shape is one dark curl
upon the beach.

Every movement of the sea,
sunny cloud and budding tree
have taught her all the things that she
can teach.

Slip a penny down the slot,
press your best eye on the spot
and every blooming curve she's got
will spin.

First a hip and then a thigh
and the thing you never spy
will fill your everlasting eye
with sin.

Man alive, you're not so old,
half so timid or so cold—
where else have you ever spent so gold
a cent?

What other hole can hold the half
reeling round that photograph—
go on, snicker, chuckle, laugh
until you're bent.

Are the lamps in her eyes lit,
soon her mouth will part a bit,
it'll mean that you'll be it
when she is through.

You're the boy she's dancing for,
you're the whole king on the shore
and you'll brain the man who whispers whore
to you.

She's the hope that's always haunted
you, the dope that's always daunted
you, the love, the life you've wanted
till you're dead.

She's the earth you've never felt before,
the sky you've always knelt before,
the sun and moon that melt before
they wed.

What the deuce has happened there now,
must you lift your head and stare now,
can it be you do not care
for what I've said?

The light went out, the room turned dark?—
you poor old fool, she turned the spark—
a hint you ought to mark
and go to bed.

Don't go back into the snow,
you're quite old enough to know
why it always happens so
in life as well.

For no matter how you strive
not a girl on earth can give
all the life you'd love to live
in heaven or hell.

Try the real ones till you rot,
you will find as like as not
that the dream behind the slot
is just as true.

And she only cost a cent
and she never need repent,
what she's done or hasn't done she meant
to do.

## *I. The Town That Knows It All*

New York's the town that knows it all,
  The town where cynics dwell:
No matter who's in love with whom,
  They wish the poor fools well,

Then peep between their heated hearts
  And leer behind their backs,
Whether they live unlawfully
  Or pay the wedding tax.

If you love me as I love you,
  It's the same old funny story:
We'll have one night of heaven and then
  Diurnal purgatory.

## *II. Cold Coquette*

She sidled down the boulevard
  With boy and man and beast.
Three flakes of snow encircled her
  December's dome released.

The three hearts saw her home again—
  The flakes had vanished quite—
But there she melted through the door
  And locked the door too tight.

The lad went home and wept awhile,
  The man slept with his wife.
The brute turned down a lighted lane
  And bought a better life.

## *III. Fascination*

Her golden eyes have fastened his,
His dark eyes flame and glow.
She looks again and she can see
The root of conquest grow.

He kisses her—her lips escape—
She knows she has him now.
He tumbles to a huddled heap,
Breathing a lifelong vow.

She leads him to a Christian church—
He thinks he leads her in.
And now Convention lies with her
She lifts her mouth to him.

## *IV. Nature Chants A Snatch Or Two*

I don't care how you sin, my dear,
  Or how you save your virtue,
Or how the man you love or wed
  Will try his best to hurt you.

The ancient plan I have in mind
  Is wild at first, then mild,
When passion droops to tenderness
  And then the hungry child.

You mustn't think me cynical,
  I'm finical and grim:
I merely want my way with you,
  My way through you to him.

## *Democratic Dramatists*
### (*For Hatcher Hughes*)

I've written a Broadway play to-day—
  Now what'll the managers do?
You've also written a Broadway play—
  It made all the managers blue?

Then you must read yours and I'll read mine,
  Mine is a tragedy too,
And if you'll put on my play for me
  I'll put yours on for you.

## *Advice To Ambitious Americans*

To reach the proper road to swift success,
Don't pity the underdog or waste your shoes
On those whom dreams of brotherhood possess,
But play the game with people you can use.

## *Young Harlem*

In these small boys and their knight-errantry
I see the guileless fool I used to be:
In each and every girl-adoring lad
There's something of the old Sir Galahad.

## *Manhattan De La Mancha*

You may laugh at dreamy lads and laugh again
When they grow up and lads in them remain
To ply the same ridiculous campaign
That poor old Don Quixote fought in Spain:

You may jeer at all the windmills and the pain,
The self-destruction their blind hearts attain,
But for all your skill may win of worldly gain,
I'd much prefer to be the knight again.

## *Harlem Stoop*

The giggling girls have nabbed another heart,
Nibbled it bit by bit and let it drop,
Let it recuperate and scamper back
Into the helpless body of the boy
Entrapped by their design so artfully made
Of an unforeseen advance and curt retreat.
Moving about the stoop like movie queens,
They give their soulful eyes a scornful glint,
And indignation lifts their shoulder blades
Whenever the dupe believes their make-believe
And comes a stuttering foot or two inside
The flagstone their society has marked
As just the proper distance for a man
To venture near superiority.
Had he the luck to find one girl alone,
He might be able to scale the lofty stoop;
But two together are far too tall for him:
Brunette and blonde set off each other's charm
And aggravate his cowardly confusion
With nudging elbows, mincing tête-a-tête
And giggling, further giggling on the air.
Had he the sophistry of twenty-one,
Had he but conquered girls before or lost them,
He'd seize these necks and bounce the heads together

And dance a gigue to the giddy rataplan.
But a lad stunted in years can barely know
Even himself, or anyone else but that:
His ailing, inconsistent little soul
The perfect paper ball on a fatal string
For kittens to poke about toward tigerhood.
The game that's just another game to them
Is a life of tragic consequence to him,
A terribly tantalizing rigmarole
In which he sees the girls not as they are,
But radiant with his own humiliation,
Causing his knees to worship in the dark
The images of his imagination.
He sees no more than what his heart can feel:
Outer and inner worlds the counterpart
Of himself, no part therein apart from that,
And everything ever so small at first,
Then larger, greater, grander, everything grand
With mystery, imbued with a holy light:
The sad, adoring flame of his loyal blood.
Haggard again he comes, slower, more feebly
Than the lamplit night before, trying first one,
Then the other of bashful feet, his eyes
Astare at stones, as hard and nonchalant
As the cool, appraising glances of the pair
Who have lured him there and laid him low together,
Who loiter along the old and shadowy stoop

And turn three steps to moonish balconies
For further conquest of the world below—
The world below a boy too shy to speak,
A shape of agonized longing, small, so small,
It starts the queens agiggling once again.

## *New Year's Eve And New Year's Day*

### *I. Gus And Al.*

What are you doin', Gus, with that tin horn?
*I'm choppin' down this bloomin' cherry tree.*
You're drunk. *I'm not. When little George was born*
*He got into the White House just like me.*
That tree's a lamppost. George never told a lie.
An' Sadie an' me an' Sally's waitin' here.
*Here's to the ladies. I'll be Boss bye an' bye.*
*What was that stuff we had, Al, was it beer?*

What do you think you're choppin' it down with, Gus?
*I'm doin' it with my little hatchet, see?*
You're drunk. *I'm not. Our country's made for us.*
*An' congressmen come out o' clerks like me.*
You tell 'im, Sal! (Come, Honey, here's a bus.
Steady, climb up, sit down.) *Gee, what a spree!*

*II. Gus And Sal.*

*It seems to be snowin' now. It's like old times.*
Confetti, dear. *An' what's all the noise I hear?*
Rockets an' trumpets, whistles, bells an' chimes.
*That was a hell of a year we had last year.*
It's nothin' now—we're nearly home again.
*My country right or wrong, Sal, here's to you.*
Now stop your cryin', dear. *That must be rain.*
Here's our number. Lean on my shoulder. *Gee, I'm blue.*

*What are them big white bottles on the stair?*
It must have been the milkman left them there.
*We seem to be climbin', Honey—straight to Heaven.*
Yes, here's the door—it's 1927.
*What's all that dancin' dancin' round my head?*
*Are you doin' it, Pal?* Yes, dear—come to bed.

## *Star Waitress*

She sails about the dining room as though
The world of working men beneath her nose
Were a herd of steaming cattle one must throw
A gingerly bone from fingertips of rose.
She bears her tray of daily bowls and dishes,
From Saturday soups and beans to Friday fishes,
With a ladylike disdain of martyrdom,
Her soul a queen no smell can overcome.

The men no longer dare to ogle her.
Her frigid air has long since frozen them.
Their eyes and innuendoes now transfer
To commoner maids a commoner diadem.
The jealous, sweating girls despise the star
Superior to them through what men are.

There ain't
gonna be
any more
mad parties
between
you and me
and it ain't
gonna be
because I
love you less
but love you more.
And there ain't
gonna be
any more
sad parties
between us two
because I'm
gonna forget
what I want
till I see
what I want
is you.
And I ain't
gonna find

what you are
till I find
what it is
that you want
of me
and how
am I
gonna see
what it is
till all
of myself
loves you.
And I don't
really love
you though I
love you more
than the world
till I learn
to swallow
whatever
you'd like
me to do.
And I ain't
gonna down
whatever
that little
may be

till I love
me less and
love you more
and love you
for yourself
alone.
If there ain't
gonna be
any loving
just you alone
then it's up
to me to
be taking
myself and
moving myself
off home.
And I'll
be dragging
what's left of me
to my lonely
room in the blue
and never
come back
and never
crawl back
till I'm through
just hugging

me.
And I ain't
no I ain't
gonna stop
doing that as
I ought to do
till I'm ab-
solutely and
positively
in love and
in love with
you.
And when I've
done that and
done only that
and done all of that
for you
you'll hear me
on the doorstep
ringing at the
doorbell
for one more
party for two.
With nothing
mad in it
nothing sad
in it but

a long glad
lifelong spree
with me myself
loving you yourself
and you
loving me
for me.

## *Old Ralph Waldo*

(*For Harry Salpeter*)

No dreamer can afford to scorn the human—
He needs warm flesh to feed the flying soul.
No transcendentalist outlives the yeoman
Who grubs the soil and brings the spirit coal.
And yet the hardy brutal realist,
Who claims no soul inhabits the earthy zone,
Must feel chagrined when some idealist
Laughs at the way he swears inside the bone.

This riddle never troubled Emerson—
The star of my youth and now the evening star.
Reading the latest tough American,
I have to re-read the old philosopher.
Whether my land grows fleshy or too pure,
'*We need more and better swearing*' brings the cure!

## *The Latest Headlines*

Double Murder In A Harlem Flat
Crew Are Lost When Liner Sinks At Sea
Chinaman Boils Rival In A Vat
Coolidge Sure Of More Prosperity
Earthquake Shakes The Whole Pacific Coast
More Folk Own Ford Cars Than Folk Who Can't
Ku Klux Watch Another Negro Roast
The Shuberts Are Reviving Charley's Aunt
Mine Caves In And Men Are Buried Deep
Never Was A Year Like 26
Valentino Dies And Women Weep
Missionaries Cross The River Styx
Opera Season Opens With Thaïs
Abie's Irish Rose Now In Fifth Year
Capital And Labor Are At Peace
Genius Dies With No One At His Bier
Congress Votes Ten Million More For Ships
Chorus Girl Takes Nightly Bath In Wine
Ten Million Readers Read Our Comic Strips
Darker Grapes Begin To Drape The Vine
Bodenheim At Last Takes Every Prize
Cal Is Certain God Is Still In Heaven
Oranges Are Twice Their Normal Size
More Prosperity In 27

Blizzard Smites New York And Traffic Stops
Washington And Wall Street Tête À Tête
Cops Arrest Poor Man When A Cork Pops
Let's Have Cal Again In 28!

## *A Dog's Life*

*(For Leon Srabian Herald)*

You hate and despise him for lying, my friends—
And yet how else can the cur make amends
Between what he is and never can be,
Crippled by Nature so pitilessly.
I've urged him to go on cheating the earth,
Deceiving folk with a much better birth,
For if he breathe on, as breathe on he must,
It's the best he can do this side of his dust.
All that he has in the little he is
Was left by two lovers who no longer kiss.
Nothing they gave him can ever grow stronger—
And still somehow he'd love to live longer—
And love to live longer as soon as he's dead—
It's the one thought keeps the one hope in his head.
If all his heart needs for its beat to repeat
Be food for the belly and blood for the feet,
I, for one, will look over his head
When he fingers my pockets, filching his bread.
There's no use in feeling the fool way I do,
But if God left him out, let Him leave me out too.
He can have what I have—and steal it or not—
And then bone to bone, let the pair of us rot.

## *Empire*

As soon as we need oil in Mexico
There'll be plenty of lads glad to go
And wrest all the oil from the Mexican
And lay down their brave lives again.

And as one soil's as good as another
Wherever the Star Spangled waves
It'll save us a great deal of bother
If we give our lads Mexican graves.

## *Factories*

### (*For Hugo Knudsen*)

Buried in one-eyed dungeons where the walls
Stare out on other walls through windowpanes,
A grinding mechanism squats and chains
Each arm and leg to slavish rituals,
The while monotonous privation hauls
Dark bodies to and fro down prison lanes
Where no soft light nor open door remains
To proffer freedom from such funerals.

The eye that peers from out each socket there
Reflects a roving madman in a cave
Striving and straining to burst the stony shell:
The look makes every cell begin to glare,
The very walls to shudder and to rave,
As each grim puppet earns his bread in hell.

## *Democracy*
### (*For J. B. C.*)

In the private smoking compartment
of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé
between Kansas City and Denver,
the delicate clouds arising
from the cigarette, stogie or pipe
beneath the brim of the
green fedora,
brown fedora
or black fedora,
of young Silas,
middle-aged Hiram
or old-man Luke,
are pretty much one and the same;
and the quick sputum,
casual sputum
or deliberate sputum,
shot at, directed or dropped
into the nearest spittoon,
spittle-box or cuspidor,
in order to punctuate
or bring suspense to
the swapping of manly anecdotes,
are pretty much one and the same;

and the ever-ready
'that one puts me in mind of,'
immediately following the cavernous
roar of spontaneous delight
set off by the brisk
fuse of a final phrase,
is pretty much one and the same,
as communal here as it is
on the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western
between Paterson and Buffalo,
the Southern Pacific
between San Diego and Los Angeles,
not to mention
the Congressional Limited
on the way to Washington . . .

## *Donkey*

I'm fool enough to think,
while April's in clover
the sun and the rain
will change what they can:

Ass enough to see,
nose enough to smell
that what grows as grass
may be the whole plan:

Ears that can hear
how the wet and the dry
as they mingle and mellow
may yet sweeten man.

## *One-Sided Wedding*

Whether he love her,
scorn her or hate,
Man has to live
with Nature:
an illegitimate
courtesan
who doesn't have to live with
Man.

## *Snails*

To bedeck his bride
and protect her from gales
he built a proud roof
fastened down with loud nails
and shortened his stride
and drew in his soul
to the dimensions and pace
of a house for snails.

## *American Aeroplane*

The latest toy
being watched by a boy
will grow feathers and fly
with the sun in its eye
and leave trains and steamers
of former dreamers
in the commonplace bed
where his fathers lie dead.

## *Seeing Her, Seeing Me*

In the middle
of a dirty deep hole
in the middle
of a nice clean
New York sidewalk
sat a cool
old cool old cat
washing and washing
her fur.
Seeing her, seeing me
what could I do
but hail her
Fellow Poet?

## *An Answer To Thomas Hardy*

Since the present is past already
  And the future will pass through too
There's naught to do but to breathe your last
  As soon as there's breath in you:

And if your father had had more sense
  He'd have saved you from the tomb
By staying outside the death-trap which
  Was once your mother's womb.

## *Trinity Churchyard, 1929*

There are one or two old graveyards
we have not yet moved away
beyond our city walls with all the rest.

It's fine to have old Trinity
remind us of divinity
but cemeteries out of town are best.

Though trees and fields are farther off,
much farther than a year ago,
and building buildings shove them
farther still,

Our continent is vast enough
and our new cars are fast enough
for us to keep in touch with what we will.

We don't know where our fathers lie
or how our mothers live on high,
we have so little time to think of dust.

For after all is said and done
our island's still a busy one
and as for all the rest in God we trust.

# MANHATTAN EPITAPHS

## *Prelude*

*I found*
*each quotation*
*on stones*
*of the past.*
*There were*
*many many more*
*and there'll be*
*many more*
*for our nation*
*is still*
*rather vast.*

## *Ages Past*

We
had a notion
we would be
a vast and
lasting nation
till something
showed us
one by one
each slight
miscalculation.

## *Too Cold*

Said
the sad soul
to the dying
heart:
Too soon
the cold
are forced
apart.

## *Little Life*

Just as he
closes his eye
he can see
the
little he was
and the less
he'll be.

## *Communion*

He stared
into the eyes
of Death
and what he saw
Death saw.

## *Moods*

The grave
has as many
moods as man
no matter
how many men
rave.

## *Keeping Pace*

Whether you run on reckless feet
or march with conscious art
doesn't really matter much
when a steely little clutch
shuts off the heat
in your heart.

## *Fame*

Here is one
with much to say
which no one heard
until this day.

## *Oblivion*

And here lies one
with much to say
he should have saved
to say to-day.

## *Derby And Crown*

This man dreamed
beneath a derby
ere the dream
turned him down
and laid him near
the man he envied—
wearing a grassgrown
crown.

## *Love*

Life
may be out
of season now
but not
Love.

## *Fulfillment*

They don't care
what happens
below
or above
so full
were their lives
with each other's
love.

## *Estranged*

Saddest of all
are these
who strove
to revive
each other's love.

## *Wind And Wind*

Wind and wind
dance
with what she was
and what she'll be:
bone and dust
till she's free.

## *This Grave*

He shall love
he shall love
he shall love
this grave
for the girl
that's in it
and the love
she gave.

## *White In The Dark*

One
stark night
the snow
regarded her
and so
regarded her
it made
and laid
a blanket
till it shone
in the dark.

## *Thieves*

The one
we loved
was stolen
by the Thief
and now
new Life
steals
grief.

## *Panacea*

Who
can complain
of dying
and lying
among flowers and trees
so long
as the sun and rain
mix you
with these?

## *Traveller*

Here is one
who could never afford
a trip around the earth
and now the earth
is kind to him
and takes him round
the sun.

## *Harlequin*

Adore
this clown
who laughed at life
and never lay down
before.

## *Riposte*

Grim
lies the wit
who poked
fun at it all
for now
the joke's on
him.

## *Beard*

This fellow
who always
hated to shave
can now
let his beard
grow as long
as the grave.

## *Hobo*

Save
the shadiest
benches
in all Kingdom
Come
for this
wandering
minstrel
the world
called a
Bum.

## *Bourgeois*

This fool
had a passion
for uptodate clothes
and never went out
without them.
Now she keeps up
with her neighbors here
and wears out
the latest cool
fashion.

## *Quiet Society*

Among
the dead
there's this
one consolation:
no tongue
can start
another
conversation.

## *Whore*

Everybody
used her
as earth
before
and now
Death
knocks
at the door.

## *True News*

Just once
in his life
this reporter
reported
a story
neither he
nor the Editor
distorted.

*Grandmother*

Trying
to climb to
high heaven
winded her so
she stopped here
at 87.

*Schoolmarm*

One last
dumb
little lad
has come
who divides
or subtracts
what she asked him
to add.

## *Old Couple*

These folk
were fond
of furniture
and took it
wherever they went
and finally
they clung to clocks
each in an
ebony box.

## *Contempt Of Court*

If only
this judge
could have
sentenced
the Wench
who gave him
a nudge—
but he fell off
the bench.

## *Time Clock*

The clerk
they left here
was so late one day
the time clock
went on
and he lost his pay.

## *The Boss*

The Boss
can no longer
give orders
here
and the clerks
bring garlands
and a crocodile
tear.

## *Two Weeks*

This tired
old cuss
whom the Boss
never fired
was in hope
of a raise
or in hopes
of a rest,
a two weeks'
vacation
in a quiet nook
where he'd lie
on his back
in a hammock
and look
at the leaves overhead
or the leaves
of a book.

## *Broker*

This Wall Street
broker is broken
at last
and no more
need he moan:
his callers
and calls
and all
are past:
he can't hear
the telephone.

## *Lawyer*

He sent so many
to jail for life,
so many
to sudden death,
he finally lost
his own private case
because he was out of
breath.

## *New Yorker*

You
did little else but worry
did little else but hurry
had nothing else but money
when Death hurried
too.

## *Burgomaster*

The man
who thought
he could run
our city
was greeted
just now
by the earth's
grave pity.

## *Theology*

Whether he was Gentile
or just an outcast Jew
(the priest who prayed to Heaven
to save your soul for you)
no psalm can help now
your body below
nor sermon determine
what the earth should do.

## *Humanity*

'Vanity,' saith the preacher,
'Inanity's all the rage.'
'Insanity,' saith the sane man,
'Humanity,' the sage.

## *Sculpture*

This critic
was wise
about sculpture
and similar
works of art.
And now
an old Sculptor
lurks about
and daintily
pries him apart.

## *Too Sensitive*

This bird
listened
to his critics
so long
the last of them
finally
silenced his song.

## *Accepted*

This was once
an editor
who rejected
the young unknowns.
When his very last breath
rejected Life
Death
got into print
on his bones.

## *Popularity*

This man
raves against Main Street,
that man
sings about Greece,
popular books
with the populace now
but not
when the populace cease.

## *Contemporary*

An ambitious soul
wrote about his age
and fell down this hole
when Time turned the page.

## *Genius*

Death
brought the breath
that gave him Death
and he the breath
that gave Death
breath.

## *Poet*

When Death
puts you in
his anthology
it'll be
without praise
or apology.

## *Three Act Tragedy*

Silvio
loved Sylvia
but Sylvia
loved Seth.

Seth
turned cold
to Sylvia
when Death
stabbed him dead.

Death
and Sylvia
fell in love
and Death
and Sylvia
wed.

## *Conscription*

Jack
was awfully
fond of Jill
and Jill
was fond of Jack.

But he
had to help
the army
fight the Huns
and drive them back.

Hans
had to join
the army too
and Jill
is wearing black.

## *Cake On Sunday*

Here are some
who died in battle:
Bring on Fame
and let it prattle
the pretty speeches
children make
when you give each one
a cake
on a Sunday
stead of bread:
Fame is Sunday
for the dead.

## *Nonchalance*

Our street
was rent
by a cry
of murder.
The sound
is gone
and our feet
go further.

## *Classics*

If there's no
better trade
for a rich man's son
publishing
brings big fruits:
There are plenty
of authors who
sell when they're dead
much better than
cloaks and suits.

## *Misanthrope*

This fellow
was always
goddamning things
from the cradle
to the sod.
And doubtless
if he
should wake up again
he'll begin
goddamning God.

## *April First*

The morning
after my
father died
I
could hear kids
on their way
to school
laugh and cry
as I
hear them still
*April Fool*
April Fool.

## *Commonplace*

What
has become
of the earth's
opinion
concerning
the Caesars
and their
dominion?

## *Underground*

Physicians
who say
this tree
is dead
can't see
the sap
in the
magician's
bed.

## *Philosophers*

Perhaps
it is well
we can't see
through the fence
for what
would philosophers
do without
whence?

## *Ephemera*

This
insect
carried
gossip
from flower
to flower
but destroyed
only those
who are
friends
for an hour.

## *Change*

There's many a word
I've used carelessly
and some I'll abuse to the end,
but as I grow older
I'm colder and careful
in the presence of the strange word,
friend.

## *Last Of All*

Last of all
they bring the grave
this silent
undertaker.
He saw Death most
and knew best of all
Life is a lovely
fakir.

## *Lonely Truth*

*The one lone*
*truth I'm certain of*
*this side the grave:*
*I haven't*
*as long to live*
*as I used to have.*

# PARK AVENUE LYRICS

## *Third Avenue Laughs At Fourth*

I'm a born, ill-bred New Yorker
  Who laughs at the bourgeoisie
Climbing on top of backs like mine
  Toward aristocracy

And storming the gates of heaven
  In a hungry hullabaloo
Only to see the old gates shut
  East of Fifth Avenue.

## *Park Avenue Fiddle*

When the guests are growing drowsy
  And are also growing dull,
The room too full of matrons and
  The matrons far too full,

The tea all drunk, the cakes all down
  And gossip in a pall,
The hostess nods for one frail man
  To lift the funeral.

He tucks his fiddle underneath
  A thin chin if he's poor
And floods the room with Bach's Chaconne—
  He'll soon be shown the door:

But if he saws the Humoresque
  And other tunes like that,
She'll write him out a Wall Street check
  And help his chin grow fat.

## *Park Avenue Portraits*

Signor has painted her portrait—
  Signor's from a foreign shore—
And he who's given her one chin less
  Will get ten orders more

From friends of the happy lady,
  The envious social clan
Who'd love to pose and be portrayed
  By such a gentleman.

## *Park Avenue Busts*

Monsieur's an accomplished sculptor,
  A talented realist:
When rich Americans sit for him
  He turns idealist

And thumbs some faithful likeness
  Of what they'd like to be:
Another stony replica
  Of aristocracy.

## *Chicken Salad*

Each Sunday night she gathers in
  Her sad-eyed repertory
Of fiddlers, flutists, pianists
  And underfed tenori,

And one by one and two by two
  They pipe and sing and play
With one eye on the music score
  And one on the buffet.

## *Foreign Furniture*

The saddest soul in all New York
  Is Mrs. Littlejohn:
She still has lots of gold to spend,
  But naught to spend it on:

She bought so many things abroad
  There's nothing left to buy
And nothing left for her to do
  But lie right down and die.

## *The Bull's Eye*

He bought some bearish common stock
  And took an awful cropper,
But then he played the bull and sold
  Some Anaconda Copper,

And now his home is safe and sound
  On bedrock sound and sure
He'll buy his wife some further sticks
  Of Grand Rapids Furniture.

## *Globe Wernicke*

The Bensons have a library
  Of leather seraphim,
But some are somewhat high for her
  And some too thick for him:

So while he scans the New York Times,
  The grave sheet he loves most,
She gallops through the Philadelphia
  Saturday Evening Post.

## *Another Wedding*

Four hundred coaches stop before
  The Presbyterian steeple
And leave behind four times as many
  Presbyterian people:

Four hundred coaches soon return
  And gobble back the people
And what has happened in between
  Resounds from out the steeple.

## *Royal Wedding*

The piety of Junior James
  Was equal to the pride
His plutocratic parents took
  In choosing him a bride:

They thought of all the blessed things
  That rise from our own soil
And chose the gushing offspring of
  Some Oklahoma oil.

## *Travelling Men*

Smith smokes a thin Corona,
  Jones a fat Monterey,
And pull by pull and puff by puff
  They blow the time away

And talk big business, talk big business
  Till their throats are sore
And both cigars are down to stubs
  And they must light two more.

## *Corporation Counsellor*

This lawyer has an oily eye,
  A lovely lively tongue:
He spies and sings what's wrong between
  The right folk and the wrong:

For if you have a hopeless case
  And lots of money too,
He'll beat the upright plaintiff down
  Who has much less than you.

## *Once A Month*

John Gore can work but once a month,
He's much too stout for more:
His tenants work six days a week
At jobs they all abhor:

His home is on Park Avenue,
The flats two blocks away:
And once a month he takes a walk
For which the tenants pay.

## *Once A Year*

The town now has democracy
From Fifth and Park to Third,
And Robinson, the millionaire,
And Brown, his proud chauffeur,

Step into booths and mark a cross
Beneath the Elephant,
Or vice versa give the Tiger
One as elegant,

And then they drive away again,
Each with an equal frown:
The noble Robinson behind the
Even nobler Brown.

## *Time Clock Rhyme*

When June begins it takes three months
  For offices to cool:
The poor boss climbs into his car
  And drives to a distant pool:

And if the summer sun is out
  Another week or more
He needs another month or two
  Along that ocean shore.

Meanwhile his clerks get two weeks off
  In a red hot marathon:
The moment one short lap is o'er
  The next long lap is on:

The next gay clerk jumps on a train
  And cools off just in time
To grab the last and fastest back
  And make the time clock rhyme.

## *Inch Worms*

The limousines and limousines
  Are crawling in a line
Toward the trees of Central Park
  Two inches at a time:

The folk are glad to see the leaves
  Of spring along the Mall
And turn about and inch by inch
  They see the same leaves fall.

## *Distinction*

Sylvester wears a uniform
  And treads a kingly tread
From the curb to the door to the curb again
  With an awning overhead.

He's idolized by chambermaids
  Who sidle through the door
And bow to him as low as he
  Bows to the not so poor.

## *Equal Quality*

It really matters little which
  Is rich and which is not—
That ladies change three times a day
  And maids wear all they've got—

For when they drop abed at night
  They lay their dresses by
And stretch their legs full length and sleep
  Or lie full length and die.

## *Hello Darling!*

Bill Golden has three telephones
  And two are comme il faut:
The one downtown and one uptown
  Too near his wife's elbow:

And so while she is playing bridge
  Through twelve or thirteen rounds,
He crawls outdoors and calls the third
  Somewhere out of bounds.

## *The Faithful Dollar*

Each sunny Sunday morning
  Or Sunday morning rain
They enter their pet churches and
  Go sound asleep again,

And when the organ offertory
  Brass begins to din
They place a faithful dollar on
  The plate for last week's sin.

## *Song Without Words*

She sings in a very small, very low voice
And looks through a very dark eye
At the ladies who stare at the men who stare
At her so demurely nigh.

Who cares how the words go that go with the tune
She chants in the Teutonic tongue?
The men may be old, but the women are older
And the girl is rather young.

She's folding her ten tender fingers beneath
Her rising, falling breast:
The ladies gaze hard, gaze hard at their men,
But they are gazing east and west:

They eye their stiff neighbors sitting straight west
Or innocently eye those east,
And who can tell how the loyal eyes lie
Or which one lies the least?

The pretty bird's chanting another quaint song,
Shyer, even shyer than before:
The ladies have lifted their eyes off the men,
And they stare straight once more.

## *Liebestod*

She hammers a grand tornado,
  Then comes a touch of spring,
And then the whole world comes to grief
  As two last faint tones sing:

Two guests applaud Encore, Encore,
  The hostess sheds a tear
And looks for James to dry the thing,
  But he's asleep, poor dear:

He's had a long hard day downtown,
  A long hard evening too,
And soon he'll have to smile and pay
  For all these artists do:

He feels a nudge, sits up once more
  And just as he clears his brain,
The heartless pianist begins
  The same damn thing again.

## *Cupid's Cupidity*

Old Doctor Blue is growing lean,
  He cannot find the cures
For all the little stomach aches
  Miss Eiderdown endures.

And even those who claim her soul,
  And not her body twists,
Have lost fat fees, though Gray and Green
  Are psychoanalysts.

Some day some Cupid not so blind
  Will eye the poor old miss
And kiss her somewhere and somehow
  And change her name to Bliss.

## *Near Relatives*

We envy the near relatives
  Of Miser Pettigrew:
Though they weep now, tomorrow they
  Will get the residue

Of all the gold they used to hate,
  The gold they now adore
As poor old Pete breathes less and less
  And they breathe more and more.

## *Park Avenue Poet*

He's written odes and villanelles
  And many a moaning sonnet,
Each with his wretched heart therein
  And her rich name upon it.

He also wrote her mother one—
  The old bear got one too—
And thanks to these inspired moods
  He dines there entre nous.

He'd love to have that monthly meal
  Come once or twice a day
And have his wife for life bring in
  His breakfast on a tray.

But come next month the postman rings
  And down four flights once more
The poet flies to the motherly note
  He read the month before.

# LAMENTATIONS

**By Alter Brody**

HERE, for the first time, is the Jew himself—not a sentimentalized interpretation of him, seen through nostalgic minds clouded by conflicts alien to the real Jew; not novelized essays on Assimilation, Zionism, Judaism, The Mission of Israel, etc.,—but plain every-day Jews, far too profoundly Jewish to be conscious of it; Jewish peasants of the Greater East Side, living and dying, loving and hating, in a circumscribed universe of their own, whose inhabitants are as little aware of the "Jewish problem" as the peasants of Synge's folk plays are of the "Irish problem." Here are Jews speaking for themselves, without prompting — sometimes brutally, sometimes beautifully, in a series of folk plays, in which a poet has magically transmuted the bold unabashed rhetoric and rhythmic garrulity of Yiddish into English, to enrich our multi-colored new literature.

$2.50

# COWARD-McCANN BOOKS

## THE ANGEL THAT TROUBLED THE WATERS and Other Plays

*By Thornton Wilder* $2.50

The celebrated author of THE BRIDGE OF SAN LUIS REY writes in many moods in these plays of great beauty and imagination.

## LAMENTATIONS: Four Folk Plays of the American Jew.

*By Alter Brody* $2.50

*Frontispiece by Hugo Gellert*

A notable contribution to the interpretation and understanding of the American Jew by a brilliant writer.

## VENUS INVISIBLE AND OTHER POEMS

*By Nathalia Crane* $2.50

*Illustrated and decorated by Ruth Jonas*

A new volume of poetry by the precocious youngster who at the age of nine startled the literary world by her confession of love for the Janitor's Boy. A real poetic achievement.

## Volumes by Alfred Kreymborg

| | |
|---|---|
| MUSHROOMS (New and revised edition) | $2.50 |
| LESS LONELY | 2.50 |
| THE LOST SAIL | 2.50 |
| BLOOD OF THINGS | 2.50 |
| MANHATTAN MEN | 2.50 |